Biddell, W. Howard 1926-1934

[325 W 71st St.]

+

[Sri Lanka

GOVERNMENT BUNGALOW
HALDUMMULLA
PROVINCE OF UVA

325 W 71st St
N.Y.C.
3 April '26

Dear Mr. Guttag

Thank you for your very nice note.

We are staying for a few days with friends in Mount Vernon, and expect to return upon Monday or Tuesday. I sail on Saturday so that my time here is getting very short now. I shall try my best to run down and see you again to say good-bye and thank you for your great kindness to me, and also to get up to the Museum and see the wood again before I sail. If I am unable to do so I will of course write from Ceylon but hope that I shall have the great

REGISTERED
APR 5 1926

pleasure of seeing you again, before my departure.

I am

yours sincerely

W. Howard Biddell.

April 6th, 1926

W. Howard Biddell, Esq.
325 West 71st Street
New York City

Dear Mr. Biddell:

I understand that you expect to sail on Saturday next. If it is possible, I hope that we shall see you again here at the Museum as I have a most interesting collection of Singalese coins which contains hundreds of Larians. This collection is now in Canada, and was bought a number of years ago in Ceylon by a Dr. Casey Wood.

I shall be here all day on Wednesday and Thursday.

Very truly yours,

Curator

below the Arms. This issue has ~~w~~ the figure 1 for (~~w~~ 1 Tanga), below the monogram: the corresponding piece of 2 Tangas, similarly has the numeral 2 in the same place. The latter is Codrington's half "Ceylon" Xerafin. The numerals, however, are so seldom clear, and the "Half Xerafin so exceedingly rare, that this fact has escaped observation so far.

ALTA
UPPER LAKE ROAD
KANDY

*25-4-34.

Dear Mr. Wood

I have been laid up for the last three months with sciatica, and unable to attend to correspondence requiring any sort of concentration -I should, however, have sent you a brief line explaining this, and apologise sincerely for not having done this. The doctors thought that I should leave Ceylon-I had bad neurasthenia too- but I hated leaving as I am so fond of the place, and now I'm glad I didnt, as with the hot dry weather of the last few weeks the pains have diminished and now I can sit up for an hour a day, and hope that another month will see me all right again. You will see that I am typing! Noiseless typewriters have just reached Ceylon ~~at last,~~ so I got one. I thought I'd learn from the start by the ~~"~~ "touch" method: hence the innumerable mistakes, which I hope you'll forgive- it is at any rate more legible than my own dreadful scrawl, also I dont get the pain~~d~~ as I~~d~~ do bending forward to write. Adverting, however, to relevant matters, I want to thank you for your nice letter of-alas-so long ago, and particularly for the exceedingly flattering and generous-however much undeserved- remarks you made about me in your magnificent Monograph. The two copies which you so very kindly sent me I shall always treasure-particularly the one in which you made the extremely nice personal entry. Thank you,too, for the most useful sheet of rubbings, as well as for the coins themselves,-together with the casts, which were most interesting. The coins unfortunately, each put me in a separate and somewhat awkward quandary,

and, reluctant though I feel about returning them, I am encouraged to do so in feeling the assurance that you will appreciate the force of my explanations. The Turkish half piastre-interesting though it certainly is, is not, after a coin of Ceylon provenance, and I feel it essential to exclude from my collection all non-Ceylon coins that have not actually been found in the Island. The rubbings, on the other hand are perfectly invaluable, and with them, naturally no possible confusion can arise. As regards the larins, I secured a fine clear specimen of the V. B. some time before your letter arrived, so I think it best to return this less clear one. Finally, coming to the"relief S.M"- I examined this closely, and came to the conclusion that whilst that is in all probability what it is: one can hardly feel that desirable final confident certainty about it, that would make me feel happy to put up in exchange some real rarity,- and it is a case where I should not feel it quite "the thing" to offer something mediocre, especially seeing that others less "finicky"than I would doubtless give their ears-or the numismatic equivalent- to possess it! It was, I must say, tremendously good of you to approach the President in the matter. Whilst appreciating his viewpoint, I must say that I think that in the rather special circumstances, a correspondingly special decision would have been the thing. ? Would he, do you think, reconsider the matter ? I have not yet thanked you for your exceedingly kind action in taking steps to recover the example of the larin that so very particularly intrigued me. I do trust that your effort has been successful. In the event of this being the case, I have something ready that will, I fancy, rather delight you. When the copies of the Monograph arrived, I discovered, to my fury, that far from deserving your kind encomium, I had omitted reference to a point of some considerable importance.

I cannot get up to refer to the book, but you will remember an Indo-P. coin which you thought shewed the date duplicated on the reverse, but were uncertain, as it was not clear:-a Tanga-Malacca- of 1633,dated

P.T.O.

ALTA
UPPER LAKE ROAD
KANDY

I drew Codrington's attention to the matter, just when he was sailing-he was profoundly interested. The coin is virtually unprocurable-but to my immense delight I secured a third example lately. It has a flaw in the reverse, but otherwise is quite a tolerable specimen for this series. It is worth £10 or so, I fancy, so the exchange will be perhaps somewhat disproportionate: however, we will regard the balance as a penalty for my carelessness in skipping that reference!

I am so pleased that you liked the coins I sent. I will keep a look-out for the coins of which you say you'd like to purchase examples -could you give me some rough sort of an idea of the figures you'd be prepared to go to, in each case? I will send you rubbings or casts of my two or three Othmanli larins when I am a bit more active -and will also see if I can obtain such of any others. One man, whom I know, may have some, but he's sailing soon, and tells me that he is too busy to get his coins out of the bank, but will do so for me on his return. 30/IV I hope you will excuse pencil, my Sciatica has taken a turn for the worse, and I am on my back again. It is an agonising malady: really I don't know what to do about it. I want, however, to get this off by today's mail, as concurrently you'll possibly get a communication which you will find extremely entertaining from either the Ministry for Education or the the museum committee, judging from the tone of the enclosed newspaper cuttings from one of the less important local papers, which a friend sent me the other day. I think the first 3 or 4 lines of the 'sub-leader' afford an adequate reply, in themselves: the whole attitude is disgracefully dog in the manger-ish. The

controversy arose I fancy as the result of an - incidentally very indifferently written - article about your monograph which appeared in the same paper - the Observer. I've a fairly good idea as to who supplied it, but I do not care to make any comments either upon that, or upon the motives that have induced the objections, as rightly or wrongly, I fear they would be regarded locally as a bit libellous ~~[illegible]~~ by some of the people concerned; and there is just a chance that this letter may be opened in the post. I hear that there is a feeling of hysterical determination growing, fostered by a few parties, to stop any antiques of any interest, from being exported in future, from the Island: - or even taken away by their lawful owners. - A nice lookout for when I want to get away, isn't it?!

Two other points in your letter, - the Larin I overlooked was extraordinarily interesting - I mean the one with an intaglio stamp of an unrecognised Indo. P. coin.

I have a single specimen of the retrograde Bhuvanaika Bahu - I fancy from the same die as the Society's specimen. I made a rubbing to send to you, but now shall have to find and send it next time.

I fear my letter is both incomplete and disjointed, but hope that you will, in the circumstances, overlook shortcomings.

With Kindest Regards

Yours Sincerely

W A Heddell

June 1, 1934.

W. H. Biddell, Esq.
Alta
Upper Lake Road
Kandy, Ceylon.

Dear Mr. Biddell:

I certainly was glad to hear from you as I had really been wondering what had become of you and I was hoping that you had not been taken ill. By this time you have received another letter from me. The other day Dr. Casey Wood arrived in this country and paid us a visit and gave us first-hand information about himself and his trip and also told us about meeting you and others there in Ceylon. At the time he was here he had heard nothing about any furore over the Gampola find.

I am most sorry to know that you have been laid up and trust that you will shortly get out of your system anything that is not good for you. I have often wondered why more people do not use the typewriter. We have long since gotten over the feeling that is not polite to write typewritten letters for business and informal personal letters. I am pretty nearly willing to wager there is a typewriter in nearly every home.

To make you feel good I am herewith enclosing No. 40 which I wrote for saying it was sent by mistake and sent them 140 instead. The impression is not very strong but the one we are keeping is no better. Between the two I was able to make a drawing showing everything. I am rather sorry you returned the relief Sumata Malla as I consider it perfectly all right and I do not know if I can budge one of the other two. I will not be able to get hold of our President for some time. If you want this back you are welcome to it and you need haveno compunctions about its value. You can rate it at nothing or anything you please. I appreciate your feelings and position and if you want it back we will put it on a value of an incuse larin. I have looked at our Tanga of 1633 and it is so lightly struck and worn that I cannot make out anything below the monogram. I am glad to know, however, that it should have a "l" there.

There have been up to date no reviews worth mentioning on the larin article. I suppose any reviewer is balking in trying to do anything about it. I am really up against it in knowing what to say in the way of putting a price on those things I desire because I know nothing of prices such things go for. Therefore, if you do make any purchases for

us I will accept your valuations and send you the money. This rather puts the buck on you but you know prices and I do not.

I was much interested in the two newspaper clippings you sent us. I have wondered all along how the laring really got out of the country. My theory was that they were sold to a traveller who would take them out without saying too much and consequently they would not have to be turned over to the authorities in case the hoard got too much talked about. The Kandy Museum evidently didn't care one way or the other. Whether the Colombo Museum knew of it or not I do not know - they are evidently laying low under the cloak of ignorance to cover up indifference. The hard thing about it all may be that the laws will be so tightened up that it may not be so easy to get things in the future and also it may not be so easy for collectors to take their things out. I have sent the two clippings on the subject on to Casey Wood to peruse. Your letter apparently was not opened as it came perfectly sealed.

We have just gotten through an extremely hard and cold winter here and now most of the country is having a very hot, dry season, the crops burning up and forest fires everywhere. From a financial and business standpoint things are a little better, but not much - in other words the depression is still with us though people do not speak of it.

Sincerely yours,

HW:JG

Curator

"Ferguson" Room,
Planters' Ward,
General Hospital,
Colombo.

ALTA
UPPER LAKE ROAD
KANDY
3-V11-34.

Dear Mr. Wood,

Very many thanks for your letter which has just arrived, together with No. 40;-a perfectly fascinating thing which delights me tremendously. ~~My~~ A note in the Paper prepared me for less than the Plate shewed. My very best thanks. I am getting off this reply at once in order to let you know that I have received the treasure, although I cannot unfortunately send you the quid pro quo until I get out of this place, which may be any time, but will, I trust, not work out at much more than a month, for apart from being infernally lingering, not to mention painful and generally tiresome, ~~it~~ this illness of mine is turning out an expensive business. The Kandy doctors gave it best in the latter part of May, so I came down to a private nursing Home run by the best man in the Island. He gave me a saline injection in the hip,-under anaesthetic, so it wasnt bad, and after a few days told me to try walking, which was by no means a success. He seemed surprised and disappointed, and gave me another similar injection, and said that I must lie up for three weeks before trying again. He was due for a holiday, and sailed a few days thereafter, so as perfect rest seemed impracticable at my bungalow without special attendants etc. , I thought it best to come straight into the General Hospital. Here I get perfect rest and excellent attention in very nice quarters, and I make a daily journey per stretcher to the thermo-electric dept. for an hour and a half of Diathermy followed by radiant heat treatment. The "rest" period elapsed three days ago, and I had my first shot at walking again, and was disgusted to find it abominably painful after the first three of four steps, The pain went off

Quickey enough, however, once I was back in bed, and I continue with a brief daily repetition of the effort. I also had my teeth X-rayed, and two with unsuspected abscesses pulled out. Altogether, however, I feel reasonably hopeful that the show will clear up, though it certainly is taking its own time about it. What is annoying is the fact of having to keep an expensive bungalow full of house-boys running,- I cant sack them, as they constitute a reliable guard over my treasures in a district that has far too many gang-robberies. However, the first hundred years are always the hardest, and, indeed, I must apologise for inflicting upon you a page and a half of whines and symptoms which really merely replace normal news of which, due to being laid up, I have none! I have not yet thanked you for your good wishes, and acknowledge them gratefully now.

Referring to the relief Sahasa Mallas; I realise that it may not be easy to pry out one of the two good examples, but if it <u>could</u> be managed, I should be exceeding grateful, and would infinitely rather send a thumping good exchange for one, than something mediocre for the specimen I returned. In the event of final failure of the alternative, however, I feel now that I would like the indifferent specimen. It is good of you to realise how I felt about the matter. I think the lack of any worth-while review to date on your Paper is simply enough explained by the fact that nobody is competent to write one, Codrington excepted; and I hear that he is fully occupied in other fields now. The rarity with which the"1" shows up on the 1833 Malacca Tanga is remarkable. It is just discernible on two of my specimens, but in another which is double-struck, one of the impressions shews the date, together with the unit below as clear as can be.

Re the coins you mentioned, suggesting cash purchase; it is very good indeed of you to offer to accept my valuations, but it will be fairest to regard the coins as on approval, and your very kind offer provisional on your not considering the prices as too high. I say this as after this

ALTA
UPPER LAKE ROAD
KANDY

illness of mine has been paid for, I shall be very glad of all the money I can tempt you to part with, so, in addition to the one or two coins you specifically enquired about, I propose to go through my cabinets when I get back, and send along any further coins that it strikes me you might care to consider. I intend to put the prices fairly high, but I hope, not too high. Actually, I shall endeavour to assess each thing at 20% less than I would tell Schulman to bid, assuming I had no example of it.

Yes, I am very afraid myself about the form in which the Antiquities Ordinance, now under revision, will get finally passed, after the State Council has had a whack at it. All the talk is to the gallery, with one eye on the next election, and the soundest plank of all is whatever glorifies CEYLON, and if, in passing it gives the European a crack, so much the better. The only people likely to take really good stuff out of the country are non-Ceylonese, so I consider a severe tightening up well-nigh inevitable. I shall have a jolly good try to get the cream of my stuff out, well ahead of the time of my own departure; once I've finally made up my mind to get out. I hope that will not be yet awhile, for I dearly love the country, although two doctors have told me that once I am well, my best course would be to get back to England, as my nerves are all to bits. Still, I think all that is a temporary phase, and that once I'm fit, I'll be as right as rain. Yes, last winter and this summer have been pretty hard over on the other side: I've heard the same from other friends in the States, and the papers too recorded the unusual weather conditions. I must shut down somewhat abruptly: my stretcher has just come up to take

me down for my daily boiling and grilling in the electrical dept.!

Yours sincerely,

W H Biddell

ALTA
UPPER LAKE ROAD
KANDY

17-IX-34.

Dear Mr. Wood,

At last I am out of hospital, after over three months of it, and glad enough to see my bungalow again, as well as to find nothing broken or missing. I dont know whether to attribute my sudden and very recent improvement to the Essence of Peppermint recommended by Dr. Casey Wood, or to massage and stretching exercises, as I commenced them simultaneously!

Anyway I suddenly improved out of all recognition, and a brief fortnight after commencing the new regime I was able to leave hospital.

I am still carrying on with the treatment, and the exercises cannot by any stretch of the imagination be termed pleasant. The nerve, however, has stretched a lot, and keeps reasonably free from pain, and lets me walk almost half a mile now, without obtruding its views unduly, as well as permitting me to sit- on cushions- for two or three hours at a stretch, so by comparison with my previous condition I certainly cannot grumble.

I've not had any time to look out any of the coins I said I would send: but hasten to despatch the Malacca Two Tangas, and hope, despite its condition which might be better, that it will interest you.

Kandy is all agog over the ~~Princes~~ Duke of Gloucester's forthcoming visit: he arrives in another three days, and is bringing the Throne and Crown and Sceptre of the last Sinhalese King, which went to England when Kandy was taken in 1815, and are now being restored to the "Nation"! The latter-day Home Policy does not, I may add, precisely coincide with the views of its Eastern Officials:- their private views, I mean! The current "dust-up",

is that the Kandyans want the things for themselves exclusively, and drag in the Kandyan Convention. The Low Country Sinhalese,- who swamp the rest put together numerically,- say that Ceylon is one glorious Unit: some wag points out that Sri Vikrama Rajasinhe was a 100% Tamil, and urges that the things be housed in Jaffna: a scandalised member of the opposition clamours that, on the other hand he was descended straight from the Sun,-via certain Aryan, and NOT Dravidian stock. The whole a thoroughly undignified and inglorious squabble. The throne that all the fuss is about is, incidentally a hideous thing, and probably originally formed an item in a convoy of diplomatic presents sent to one of Rajasinhe's predecessors in the XVIII Century, being crudely decorated with gold plates and whatnot thereafter!

Being just out of hospital I have little news, so will close. I will go through the coins as soon as I can get about freely.

I hope you are keeping fit, and that the labour upheaval will be over before this reaches you.

With Kind Regards,

Yours sincerely,

W.H. Siddell.

October 18, 1934.

W. H. Biddell, Esq.
Alta Upper Lake Road
Kandy, Ceylon.

Dear Mr. Biddell:

Your letter of July 3rd came in due course. At the time I was on my vacation which took place off and on most of the summer and since I have gotten back into harness I have been pretty busy gathering up lose ends. I am now getting busy answering not only this letter but your letter of September 17th, which came yesterday.

I am glad to know that you are out of the hospital and trust that the seige you have been going through is a thing of the past. As for our country, although no one now speaks of the "depression" things are not much better than they were. Several million men are working, most of them at government expense. Trade picks up by fits and starts and I think on the whole there is more hope and less pessimism. The middlewest during the summer had a terrible dry time of it, the east stayed fairly wet. During the autumn we had so much rain there were local floods. I think everybody here is preparing for a cold winter.

I hear now and then from Dr. Casey Wood. He seems to be very busy and writes only a few lines at a time. In one of his recent letters he wished to be remembered to you.

I am glad to get the Malacca type of the two tange value. We had no two tanga of this type. All ours were GA.

I was much interested in your latest Ceylon news with the peace offering, you might say, of the throne and crown. I must cut this short now andsomebody is coming in to see me.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator